WRITTEN ANSWERS TO UNSTARRED QUESTIONS

Price support for saffron crop

342. SHRI EKANATH K. THAKUR : Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state :

(a) whether Government are aware of the fact that for the first time in four years, Kishtwar's saffron farmers are expecting a good saffron crop;

(b) if so, whether Government have noticed the fact that official neglect has hit the farmers' interests hard and they rarely get the attention and the prices they deserve; and

(c) if so, the efforts, Government propose to make the Government-run price support mechanism available for the benefit of such farmers?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI HUKUMDEO NARAYAN YADAV) : (a) and (b) Saffron, which is a rainfed crop, is cultivated in an area of more than 60 hectares covering Pochhal, Matta, Hatta, Begana, Berabhatta, Cherhar, Hanjala, Sangramabhatta, Hidyal etc. in Kishtwar. In the year 2003, during the critical season of growth in the months of July-August, the rainfall was insufficient as a result of which 20-25% crop was damaged. It was due to adverse weather and not the official neglect that the crop did not bloom to the full.

(c) No request has so far been received for inclusion of saffron under the price support schemes, *viz.* Minimum Support Price (MSP) and the Market Intervention Scheme (MIS). This also reflects the fact that saffron, which is a high value crop, may not require any price support.

Assistance to Andhra Pradesh from NCCF

343. DR. ALLADI P. RAJUMAR : Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Andhra Pradesh Assembly has passed a unanimous resolution requesting the Central Government to immediately release Rs. 96.12 crores from National Calamity Contingency Fund and 15 lakh tonnes of rice under the Swarna Jayanti Grameen Rozgar Yojana to meet the need of drought affected areas of the State; and

(b) if so, the response of the Central Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI HUKUMDEO NARAYAN YADAV) : (a) and (b) The Government of Andhra Pradesh had submitted a memorandum seeking assistance of Rs. 996.12 crores from National Calamity Contingency Fund (NCCF) and 15 lakh MTs of foodgrains for relief employment for the drought declared this year. An Inter-Ministerial Central Team visited the State from 3rd to 7th November, 2003 for an on-the-spot assessment of the situation. This will now be considered by the High Level Committee (HLC), headed by the Deputy Prime Minister, for a decision on the quantum of assistance to be provided to the State in the wake of drought. Meanwhile, one lakh MTs of foodgrains for relief employment and entire Central share of Calamity Relief Fund (CRF) for 2003-04 amounting to Rs. 171.96 crores for undertaking immediate relief measures have been provided to the State.

Promotion of organic farming

344. SHRI EKANATH K. THAKUR: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have formulated a national project on organic farming with an outlay of Rs. 99.58 crore to improve the soil health;

(b) whether the project envisages the setting up of National Institute of Organic Farming (NIOF) for the production, promotion, market development and regulation of organic farming in the country; and

(c) if so, the details of the proposed scheme?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI HUKUMDEO NARAYAN YADAV): (a) and (b) A new Scheme on 'National Project on Organic Farming' with an outlay of Rs. 99.58 crores for implementation during Tenth Plan period has been formulated. The project envisages setting up of 'National Institute of Organic Farming (NIOF)' for the production, promotion, market development and regulation of organic farming in the country.

(c) The main components of the project are as under:-

(i) Setting up of National Institute of Organic Farming;

(ii) Capacity building for promotion of organic farming;